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ABSTRACT

This paper examines implications for teacher education derived from the evaluation of a distance education program for the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. The program was established in 1989 to meet the educational needs of Guild members who travel from town to town providing agricultural and equestrian shows. A review of the literature reveals that there are numerous difficulties faced by highly mobile students and by rural students and teachers. Interviews conducted with children, parents, home tutors, and itinerant teachers focused on their perceptions of their lives and their general views on education. Data from the interviews revealed the existence of extended and intensive social networks that sustain the itinerant lifestyle. Respondents evaluated the distance education program positively as meeting the educational needs of show children. Work and the work ethic played an important role in the development of children's distinctive identity, while sport and play were associated with local schools and socializing with local children. This study points out the importance of teacher graduates being acquainted with the increasing variety of educational experiences, implications of distance education for children, and benefits and limitations of distance education programs. (LP)

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LESSONS FROM THE CARNIVAL: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATION OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA

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This paper presents the first results of current research being conducted by a number of educationists at the University of Central Queensland. We are assessing the effectiveness of a distance education program designed and implemented by the Queensland Department of Education to meet the educational needs of the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. These needs derive from the mobility of the children and their parents, who are rarely in any one town for more than a week during the show circuit.

Factors in the apparent success of the program include the active lobbying undertaken by Guild members; the involvement of several Guild parents; the commitment of the small number of Department of Education teachers; and the interactive nature of the materials in the program. On the other hand, there is a possibility that the program assists in perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby Guild children are denied opportunities to participate in a wider range of school experiences, or build up on-going peer relationship networks.

The paper considers some of the lessons for Australian teacher education of this particular program. These lessons include the importance of teacher graduates being acquainted with the increasing variety of educational experiences; with the implications of distance education for children; and with the benefits and limitations of programs such as this one. Suggestions are made also for teacher education students to become involved in research of the type reported here, by refining possible assumptions about this kind of education for further reflection and action. Finally, the paper presents elements of a possible model of distance education that might offer replicability to other itinerant groups from different geographical areas (UNESCO, 1989).

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[1]Requests for a copy of this paper should be directed to the senior author.

LESSONS FROM THE CARNIVAL: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATION OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA[2]

INTRODUCTION

Until a few years ago, parents in the Showmen's Guild had three options for educating their primary school aged children. They could keep them with them and supervise their correspondence lessons as they travelled from show to show; they could send them to boarding schools; and they could send them to day schools while living with relatives in one city or town. Each option had its associated emotional, social, and educational costs, reflecting a perceived "trade off" between the parents' itinerant lifestyle and the children's schooling needs.

In 1989, the Queensland Department of Education, through the School of Distance Education based in Brisbane, established an innovative program in delivering distance education to primary school students. The program was designed to meet the educational needs of the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia, some of whose members had been active in lobbying for the creation of such a program.

These educational needs derive from the mobility of the children and their parents, who are rarely in any one town for more than a week during the show circuit. Families follow one of a number of circuits that cross State borders and occupy most of the year.

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[2]The writers are grateful to the following groups and individuals for their assistance in writing this paper: the parents, children, and home tutors of the Showmen's Guild for agreeing to be interviewed; the staff of the Queensland School of Distance Education for their willing co-operation; the other members of the Professional Growth Research and Teaching Group for their support and encouragement in the project; Ms Bonita Frank for transcribing the interviews; and the Faculty of Education for assisting with travel costs. The project was funded by a University of Central Queensland Research Grant (ER/U/399). The writers accept responsibility for the views expressed in the paper.

Although there are efforts to extend the program, at present it operates in eighteen Queensland cities and towns.

The program has several distinctive features. The children complete correspondence lessons in various subjects covering all years of primary schooling. They are assisted in these lessons by their parents and/or home tutors, and by School of Distance Education teachers who join them in some towns in the show circuit and work intensively with them during those weeks. These lessons are conducted mostly in classrooms at local primary schools. Basic technologies, such as a 008 telephone number (whereby long distance calls are charged at the cost of a local call), are used to facilitate communication between the parents and home tutors on the circuit and the teachers when they are in Brisbane.

This paper reports the first results of continuing research being conducted by a number of educationists at the University of Central Queensland. A review of related literature, elements of a theoretical framework, and methodological considerations are presented. These provide a provisional conceptual perspective for interpreting the results of a number of semi-structured interviews conducted with various participants in the show circuit in July 1992. Finally, the results are examined for their implications for Australian teacher education in the 21st century.

RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this section of the paper is not to present a literature review, but rather to identify a small number of items that raise related conceptual issues that lead logically to the developing theoretical framework for the study.

Hemmings and Boylan (1992) reported an innovation in pre-service teacher education developed at a provincial university in New South Wales. A cohort of second year students agreed to carry out a three week period of practice teaching in remote rural schools that they would otherwise be unlikely to experience. A supplementary questionnaire revealed a unanimous expression of preparedness to teach in remote areas after graduation. Such innovative practices might well be valuable in more effectively preparing student teachers to work with groups such as those in the present study.

Stevens (1992) focussed on four dimensions of rural education: relationships between rural teachers and their students, together with the local communities; relationships between rural teachers and the government department of education; relationships between

rural teachers and the teaching profession; and rural teachers' perceptions of their professional socialisation and the future. His studies of two rural secondary schools in Queensland revealed distinctive perceptions and concerns experienced by rural teachers about their professional work and their relations with their urban colleagues. His concluding assertion that rural educators should reduce their personal and professional isolation brings to mind the need for a more responsive teacher education program, among other initiatives. It suggests also that relations between local teachers and staff members of the School of Distance Education might fruitfully be explored in subsequent phases of this research.

Rahmani (1985) explored the notion of turbulence, which has been used to describe the continual transfer of children from one school to another. Rahmani documented some of the educational difficulties connected with this phenomenon, and suggested specific remedies to minimise them. Elements of turbulence might be identified in some of the quotations presented later in this paper.

In developing an alternative model for organising distance education programs, Harley (1986) urged a reconceptualisation of correspondence programs centred on the recognition of home based learning and teaching, children being encouraged to function as active learners, the use of family groupings for schooling, and compatibility between curriculum materials used in the programs and the underlying philosophy and structure of the administering organisation.

In an international study of nomadism, Ezeomah (1990) claimed that, despite their continuing economic viability, nomads are the most seriously disadvantaged group in acquiring educational and welfare services because of their constant migration and dispersion. Ezeomah suggested strategies for improving the educational prospects of nomads, including boarding schools, mobile teachers, radio technology, and correspondence schools.

Briody's (1979) evaluation of the Mobile Classroom Project in Central Queensland in 1978 and 1979 remains pertinent. The classroom, staffed by two teachers, visited four to six isolated sites for two consecutive weeks twice or three times each year, to extend the educational experiences of primary school children enrolled in correspondence schooling. Perceived benefits of the program included students' increased awareness, motivation, socialisation, and verbalisation, as well as reported greater self-development for parents

who worked with their children on the program.

Clearly there are particular difficulties to be faced by highly mobile students and by rural students and teachers. Several strategies have been suggested to overcome some of these difficulties, with implications for both teacher education and the delivery of distance education. On the other hand, there is certainly no mandate to impose on itinerant or isolated families an "urbocentric" version of schooling. These few studies have prepared the ground for the inchoate theoretical framework to be presented in the next section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this paper is qualitative and falls largely within the interpretive paradigm (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, ch. 3; Sampson & Kenway, 1992).

Within this qualitative and interpretive framework, an underlying concern is with the connections between schooling and personal and social identity.[3] This concern derives partly from the desire to answer criticisms that qualitative research is - at least potentially - insufficiently analytical and theoretical (Sultana, 1991, p. 60). At the same time, the concern with links between schooling and identity has emerged from the data of the study, thereby conforming to the penultimate stage of the grounded theory approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967).[4]

The theoretical framework unfolding from the research has several elements. One element is the contrast between the researchers' often implicit assumptions about the lifestyle of itinerant groups before they began the study and the fact that many members of the Showmen's Guild do not perceive themselves as itinerants. Many respondents nominated "Brisbane" or "the Gold Coast" in response to the question "Where is home for you?"; some added that this was where they spend their Christmas holiday and/or where their non-iterant relatives lived.

Another element of the theoretical framework focussed on the fact that many members of the Showmen's Guild referred to perceived similarities and differences between

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[3]For a vivid case study of the impact of an élite girls school on the identity of some of its students, see Kenway (1992).

[4]The description is "penultimate" rather than "final" because the researchers recognise that data about the educational experiences of other itinerant groups need to be collected before systematic theory building can be attempted.

themselves and other groups connected with the show circuit, notably "the itinerants", "the horsey people", and "the workers". On the one hand, they identified attributes that distinguished all members of the show circuit from outsiders (such as a supposed lack of comprehension of what life on a show circuit entails and a belief that those involved on the circuit must enjoy the excitement of "show day" three hundred and sixty-five days a year). On the other hand, references were made to the exclusive membership of the Showmen's Guild and to the possible applicability of aspects of the stereotyped "showie" to other groups but not to themselves.

Yet another element of the theoretical framework derived from the diversity of experiences and opinions among the participants in the research; this applied to both the Showmen's Guild members and the researchers. People define their identities in terms of who and what they are not; when talking to university researchers, Guild members sought to distinguish themselves from other groups involved in the show circuit and from Guild members who travel on different circuits. Yet this should not disguise the wide spectrum of beliefs and intentions held by individual Guild members connected with this circuit, on issues ranging from the benefits and limitations of their mobility to the particular features and requirements of itinerant education.

From the researchers' perspectives, several aspects of constructed identity could have emerged as a focus of interest. Gender, class, race, and age are clearly major determinants of identity, and might well be explored in subsequent stages of the research. For the present, attention has been directed at issues connected with itinerancy and rurality. While this was a major concern of the original research proposal, it derives also from the backgrounds and experiences of this particular group of researchers.

Regardless of whether some Guild members perceive or represent themselves as itinerant, to "outsiders" their lifestyle conforms to that variously labelled "itinerant", "mobile", and "nomadic". Gabriel's (1990) depiction of the essential characteristics of the nomad is therefore worth consideration.

> Nomads belong to different cultures. They come from different periods of history. From different time periods, they constantly incorporate and evolve a unique variation of spiritual, artistic, and cultural expression. There are as many different lifestyles and aesthetic norms in the nomadic form of social organisation as there are cultures and peoples in the world. Nomads are

known to be rooted in myth, legend, and folklore...

The impact of their art and their way of life has two important aspects:

1. The fundamental idea that all life, experience, and existence is without frontiers or boundaries.
2. The foundational idea of not glorifying fulfilment in terms of territory or resources. (p. 396)

The evident contrast between these features of nomadism and the lifestyle of the Showmen's Guild (which has fixed stages and sequences of mobility and residence) creates a conceptual difficulty for the researchers. Members of the Guild are not nomadic, at least in Gabriel's terms, but neither do they conform to the settled residence patterns characteristic of most Australians. The question to be explored in future studies is whether itinerancy may be conceptualised in terms of the degree of structure, with groups such as gipsies and reindeer herders living a relatively loosely transient lifestyle, and other groups such as barge children or Showmen's Guild children living a fairly tightly structured transient lifestyle. Alternatively, issues of itinerant identity might emerge as far more fluid and idiosyncratic than a dichotomy (or even a continuum) suggests.

It emerges from this theoretical framework that the itinerant lifestyle of the Showmen's Guild provides a context for interpreting and responding to their schooling needs. Thus, while there will be several features of the interviewees' language that other students and parents will recognise as reflecting their own situations, there will also be aspects that are unique to the particular lifestyle of the Guild. The subjective meanings of individuals will be used to derive a wider understanding of the educational program devised by the School of Distance Education and the responses to the program by members of the Guild. The interpretive categories of itinerancy and identity have been used to guide the researchers' readings of what they have heard and observed.

METHODOLOGY

Elements of the methodology used in the study have been reported elsewhere (Wyer, Woodrow, Hallinan, Rose, Duncum, Danaher, Kindt, Moran, Purnell, & Thompson, 1992) in relation to sampling, interviewing techniques, and ethical considerations. Underlying these elements has been the form of grounded theory advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This paper, and another paper being presented almost simultaneously

(Wyer, Thompson, Kindt, & Danaher, 1993), report initial interpretations of selected categories of data.

In July 1992 at the Mackay show five researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with sixteen children, seven parents, and three home tutors involved in the program. The interview schedules were as open ended as possible; we wished to record people's perceptions of their lives, their general views of education, and other relevant information. Using the Hyperqual computer package, we coded the interview transcripts, using as categories themes that appeared to be addressed by a number of interviewees. In the process of coding, we were careful to record or "memo" our growing understandings of what we encountered.

Various means were carried out to determine the extent to which individual perceptions were shared by other researchers. During breaks between interviews, and after the interviews had been completed, the researchers discussed with one another what seemed to be emerging. We obtained valuable feedback from staff members at the Queensland School of Distance Education, which helped to correct some misconceptions and to clarify our thinking. Finally, the 1993 stage of the study contained questions intended to check on our developing perceptions with members of the Showmen's Guild.

Two important delimitations of the study should be noted. The first was that the research was not designed as an informal review - and was certainly not a commissioned evaluation - of the program. In the initial stage of the study, we were at least as interested in the interviewees' experiences of itinerancy as in details of the program. Secondly, although important research themes (such as the gendered nature of itinerant education) have not been addressed to date, it is likely that as staff members enter (or re-enter) the study, some of these themes will be explored.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

A number of themes emerged from the data. The researchers acknowledge both the impossibility of representing perfectly someone else's perceptions of the world and the potential for allowing their own preconceptions to influence their interpretations of other people's perceptions. On the other hand, these themes were mentioned independently by a number of interviewees from all three groups - children, parents, and home tutors. They resulted also from a research methodology that in many cases allowed interviewees to

speak about what was important to them, rather than by following a rigidly prearranged interview schedule.

Accordingly, with confidence that at least some of the Showmen's Guild members' voices have been heard, the following themes will be used as categories for discussing the data analysis and the results:

Itinerancy and social networks.

Itinerant education and program evaluation.

Work and play.[5]

Itinerancy and social networks

Itinerancy

Itinerancy is a way of life for these children, as for other groups. However, it is a form of itinerancy unique to these children, being a highly structured and ultimately repetitive pattern, from one year to the next. Itinerancy inevitably impacts upon peer relationships, with tensions caused by the sudden influx of a tightly knit group of children into local school peer culture for a short period of time (usually four or five days). One of the home tutors commented on this issue:

> ...most people [teachers] are really good and they welcome them...but sometimes you get the odd one that's got a really nasty attitude towards the [show] children...I've never really sort of forgot about it.

This tutor went on to make some perceptive points about local schools generally, and the knowledge of local teachers in particular:

> At the end of the week, normally I say, "What's your opinion?" Not every week, but every couple of weeks, I say to the teacher at the time, I ask her to have a look at his work, and I get John to read to her and she compares it with her own students, just so I know how [his] progress would be in a normal schooling curriculum...If I'm having trouble with something, with John, I'll ask the teacher what she thinks would be the best way to handle him, and normally I get a lot of feedback from all different ways of doing it, and that helps me a lot.

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[5]In keeping with common practice in reporting the results of qualitative research, the names of individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

Itinerancy also throws into relief differences among various Australian State education systems. The group as a whole (particularly the parents) appreciated what they perceived as special concern for the children's education from Queensland, since the new program commenced in 1989, in comparison with more conventional offerings from other States.

Given the group's lifestyle, the concept of home might seem problematic, being confined to the mobile caravans. However, this was not always the case, with some children being very clear about the differences between life on the road and "real" home.

Social networks

Many themes appear under this broad heading. Interviews typically began with a question about family structure. Children explained their own immediate family network. Adult interviews cross-checked these details, but in addition asked about their earlier histories. Home tutors spoke about their own background:

> Going on to my third year now...[as tutor, and before then, all sorts of jobs, such as] from on a farm, to bar work, to kitchen hand... Jack-of-all-trades.

Another aspect of the influence of social networks could be seen in vocational aspirations. While parents wanted their children to have freedom of choice in this area, there appeared to be a tacit recognition that "the show must go on", and that many of the children will in fact continue in their parents' footsteps. One home tutor put it this way:

> ...a lot go to boarding school, and come back...Some people have left the showgrounds, gone to university and studied and decided they didn't want to do that, but some people will leave school at Year Ten and just get something given to them or will work for it to start their own business up and just follow on with what their parents were doing...They know that if they work they're always going to have money there...That must be a secure thought for them.

Such values were reinforced by the close relationship between home and work for these families, a rather unusual aspect for most families in industrialised societies today. One parent put it very well:

> Where most people would be concerned with seeing their eight year old son running around the show all afternoon on his own, every person out there knows who Stephen Jones is, and is watching him to make sure nothing

> happens to him. So you have all the aunties and the uncles who aren't really blood...It's a very loving community...If you can understand what I am trying to say, we live and work together [and are very close knit].

This closeness of relationship was reflected both within the Showmen's Guild itself and in interactions between Guild members and members of related groups, such as "the itinerants", "the horsey people", and "the workers".

One home tutor explained the duties of itinerants thus:

> Itinerants are people who sell things like show bags, like a lot of the people in the pavilions and *on the edges of the show* [emphasis added], and they aren't allowed to camp in the showground camping area, and usually they have to camp out the gate and stuff like that. They aren't allowed to sell things that we sell, fairy floss, dagwood dogs, they aren't allowed to have [operate] rides and they aren't allowed to have games like we do either. They can only sell, *they can't really do things that the Showmen do* [emphasis added].

Another distinct social group is made up of casual workers. To quote the same home tutor:

> Workers being workers say different things to what a lot of these ladies might say...Sometimes workers and Showmen don't get on, there's a bit of a class distinction here. But being a tutor I found absolutely none, I get treated with respect, whereas I will admit, you look at a lot of the workers, and they do look dirty, they do do the wrong things. Showmen have had workers who steal money off them, rip them off, stuff like that.

Tutors may have been previously employed as itinerants. One tutor noted problems that can arise when role expectations are subsequently infringed:

> I had a bit of trouble with Billy, he thought because I'd worked in a canteen for them [Billy's parents] before, that I should be working in the canteen instead of his mother, and that his mother should be up here doing this [tutoring] with him...Like he says to me sometimes, "All I ever want is my mum to go to school with me."

It is not surprising under these conditions of tightly enforced socialization that relationships between "showies" and "the locals" were sometimes tense, a factor

recognised by children and adults alike. Some incidents may be more easily dismissed by the show children than by the locals, as this comment from a show child revealed:

> There was just all this rubbish about the cops saying she'd robbed a bank and all that rubbish.

Other problems could arise when local children over-stepped the bounds of their new-found friendship:

> ...people sort of nag us, saying, "Will you give us a free ticket?" and all.

Home tutors themselves might get caught up in such tensions:

> ...a prime example was at...school with him and all the other kids were staring at us through the window. About thirty children were staring at us, and so naturally they put on this big show at lunch time. We were just eating lunch, Mary actually and another girl and I, we were just sitting quietly eating lunch, and this teacher walked up. We were sitting on top of these port racks [small storage shelves for children's bags], didn't even speak to us, just pointed at us, "Get off the port racks." And I thought, I'm an adult, not a child. And then someone left a paper on top of the port rack and she must have been standing half a metre away from me, instead of saying, "Excuse me, could you get one of the girls to put it in the rubbish bin?", she just stood there and put this horrid look on her face and just pointed at me and pointed at the paper. So I just chose to ignore it, like I hadn't seen it. That's totally rude.

Recognising these aspects of life on the show circuit, some local schools set up a "buddy system", whereby designated local peers were paired with show children on the first day at the new local school. "Buddy" duties covered anything from pointing out the location of school toilets to welcoming the newcomers into playground games during recess.

What seemed a good idea from the point of view of some "locals" was greeted with either ambivalence or outright scepticism and antipathy by the show children. This response clearly indicated the protective network centred on the show children in action. A home tutor commented that, while individual show children might be friendly to locals, "there are some other kids who would rather stick to their own friends and associations".

Itinerant education and program evaluation

Itinerant education

Without a program for the children, their education would suffer if they attended local schools and tried to join the lessons that the non-itinerant children completed, according to one parent:

> And I suppose the teacher thought, "Well, what can I teach this kid in three days? I won't worry about it", so they didn't. And then they did their correspondence at the school. That was a little bit better - but this is a lot better...Before that, the kids just went to boarding school. They just went to school from town to town until they were about ten and then they went to boarding school.

She believed that, even with the program, itinerant education was much more demanding for children and their families than non-itinerant education.

> It would have to be, wouldn't it? Even with the program that they're on now,...they've still got to pick everything up and go to another classroom. It's not even as if they can leave some books in their desks until tomorrow or the next week, they have to take everything with them. It's obviously a lot better than what it was before.

She also believed that correspondence schooling, without the children attending local schools in different towns, had several problems.

> I don't know how the parents managed with the correspondence. I couldn't have done it. I think you've got to have a lot of patience to do correspondence with your own kids. I mean, to be a mother and a teacher, and the kids just saying, "Well, I'm not doing it". If you're a teacher, you can say, "Yes, you are", but if you're the mother you just don't seem to be able to do anything about it. I've seen plenty of people nearly fall apart trying to do correspondence. It must be really hard.

Another parent suggested that one solution to this problem was to have a separate caravan used exclusively for school work and homework, "because then you can reinforce that you're not their mother, you're away from that environment". This would have the effect of separating "home" and "school" and demonstrating the value attached to schooling:

> Because your caravan is home,...[and] if you have your little school van it's somewhere where you know you can go and that's where you do your school work.

She believed also that itinerant education has many compensations unavailable to non-itinerant children, particularly in the form of "hands on" education.

> Our kids will go to a beach and see the sea shells...They're actually travelling to so many different areas where sugar cane's being grown, where [there]'s cattle, where [there]'s sheep, and they are seeing so many different environments, and they're smelling, touching, seeing the whole bit. So really they have that advantage as well.

However, she felt that itinerant education made more difficult the identification and remediation of specific learning problems.

Children said that they did their homework in different places. One boy did so in the truck attached to his parents' caravan, another boy in his parents' caravan, another "in the lounge in the caravan", another in his home tutor's caravan at the back of his parents' truck. Some children had separate desks and chairs for their work; others worked at the ends of kitchen tables. A common statement was that the children's home tutors (if they had them) and their mothers, but usually not their fathers, helped them with their homework. A seven year old boy explained his father's encouragement of his work: "That's what dad always says, 'Shut up and do your work'". An older girl said that her father did not receive an extensive formal education and that he felt that he could not contribute very much to her or her younger brothers' schooling. She said that, when the children did not attend the local school, her mother made her brothers and her follow "exactly the same rules", with the same amount of time for morning tea and lunch breaks. On the other hand, another girl said that "we don't usually get lunch breaks - we just sit and work, when you're finished you eat".

Program evaluation

Although it was not the researchers' intention to evaluate the program, many unsolicited comments expressed firm opinions about its effectiveness. Comments were largely favourable. One home tutor praised the detailed notes and study guides that she received, and found a two week seminar for home tutors very helpful. Another tutor gained much satisfaction from the seminar, which she requested as an annual event for

parents as well as tutors.

> I picked up a couple of very, very good points on teaching,...a few different things to say, and a few different ways of how a child learns...by the five senses...

One of the parents, who had played an active part in lobbying for the program's creation, felt that it was achieving its aims. A principal benefit was that the children now derived some meaning from their schooling.

> Now with the program they're not only a part of something that belongs to them, that they feel a part of, we have a gauge, a learning system that we can control...I know with Stephen, my son who's eight, in Grade Three, he's right up to date with the average school, and in some subjects he's also ahead, so you can't be happier with the program.

Although there had been some problems with the postal service, she felt that her son's work had not suffered.

> So that's the only gauge you can use. As long as they're up to date and you are getting the work through quickly. And the quality is very, very good, everything's excellent.

She believed also that the children's social skills had improved significantly.

> Going in shy, having to walk into a class with thirty other kids and not know any. Now, as I said, these kids are a part of something and they know it, and their self esteem and confidence is up here.

However, the same parent felt that the distinctive changes and pressures involved with adolescence would cause her to opt for boarding school rather than a continuation of the program for her own children.

> I'm not saying that it won't work for anybody, but there hasn't been a teenager, like a high school student, that's gone through in the distance program to say that it will work, because it is very, very hard.

One parent felt that it was essential to continue the program in different Australian States, in order to provide "a follow through" for the children's education. A complication is that the circuit divides in different States, so that numbers of students in different towns would be too small to warrant the development of a specialised program for them. For that reason, a request was made for one or two teachers to accompany the circuit from

one State to another. A home tutor felt that the age range was too great to have only one or two teachers working with twelve to fifteen children.

The home tutors also expressed their views about the program. One tutor found most of the materials well written, although social studies was a little "dry". She supplemented the lessons shared by her student with other children by giving him separate practice in computing and using a library. She referred to computer work in different schools, swimming lessons, and a talk by a museum representative arranged especially for the children involved with the program. Another tutor, who had worked with both the Queensland and the New South Wales programs, preferred the Queensland program, which she found "much more compact" and "so much easier to follow what is expected of the children". She claimed that all the equipment needed in "the New South Wales system...was just a waste of time, a waste of space, but this system up here...is excellent". She described the correspondence system before the introduction of the new program as "chaos", partly because it provided no guidance to parents about how to teach the material to their children.

The children involved in the program also commented on its effectiveness. One ten year old girl found most subjects very interesting, but she regretted having to interrupt her work in order to travel to the next town: "Sometimes you have to go somewhere and you've got to leave it". She also felt that sometimes there were more interruptions to the routine of completing the program at the local school than if she spent the day working in her caravan. Her view of tutoring her seven year old twin brothers when her mother was busy with show work was philosophical: "Sometimes, if it's a good day [they do what they are meant to do]. Like you can have bad days too". By contrast, one of her twin brothers preferred working at the local school, because "at home [at the show]...there's a lot of noise and all that, but at school there's not". A ten year old girl said that she preferred going to school in Queensland rather than New South Wales because of the program's operation in Queensland and the company of her friends from the show circuit. One twelve year old boy claimed that previously "I didn't learn much because it changed everywhere", when children started new content every time that they attended a different school. Now, by contrast, "we know the different schools, we take the correspondence to each school, like [we] keep following on from the last week". However, another boy said that "if I miss a day when we're travelling, I've got to do it at home rather than at

school". The opportunity to use computers at local schools was also appreciated.

Work and play

Work

Work and the work ethos appear to have an important role in the early development of the Showmen's Guild children.

Several of the interviewed children clearly defined their work roles within their family businesses. Working the "joints" as staff had meal and rest breaks, or collecting money in the ticket box for rides, were daily activities for many children on the show circuit. Others reported that they performed ancillary functions in the family businesses, including paid baby sitting and household chores.

Despite the obvious glamour and excitement of the show, few of the children mentioned it as a recreational facility. The show was definitely a serious work arena, not a playground. Potential friendships formed in the playgrounds of local schools were treated with caution, as the show children often felt that the basis of the friendship with local children was the presumed intention to secure free rides.

So enshrined was the value of the showground as a workplace that most of the interviewed children expressed a desire to operate their own "joints" in adult life. This youthful entrepreneurship was evidently reflected in mathematics being consistently reported as the preferred foundation subject, often on the basis of its perceived relevance to handling money.

Play

Sport and recreation were nominated by many interviewees as a major benefit of attending local schools. One home tutor described her student's participation in the program:

> He only goes so he can play a game of football with his mates and that sort of thing. He doesn't really learn anything because then...[the School of Distance Education teacher] comes up...[She's] that excited to see them all, but just puts so much of her heart into it that she forgets her head. She's just such a wonderful person, but she's just not there for the academic side, that all falls by the wayside then.

The children are quick to recognise the value of sport and play. Many reported that they were able to socialise most easily with local children through play. One boy, asked if

he had special friends at any school that he had attended, replied, "...not like real special, but I've got good friends here [at the local school]...we play soccer with a bunch". Another boy said that he loved to play football, soccer, tennis, and handball with his "buddies" at the local school. A ten year old girl nominated sport as her favourite subject, because she could walk around and talk to people.

The lack of play and sporting opportunities in the program was acknowledged by one parent:

> There are certain things our kids miss out on which is the obvious sports which we are trying to get them involved with now, and certain arts and crafts.

Several children identified differences in games and rules among schools. These differences ranged from the various codes of football to idiosyncratic games such as "Tickets" that the children played at particular schools.

Play extends beyond the playground. The children enjoyed the opportunity to play in the classroom as well. The inclusion of games such as dominos and snakes and ladders in the mathematics program was favourably reported.

The widespread enjoyment and importance of sport and play to the Showmen's Guild children is little different from that of other children. It was encapsulated in a comment by an eight year old child: "I like going out and kicking a ball or something, or I like fielding, and sometimes I play...".

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

This paper has sought to report the initial stage of continuing research into the schooling experiences of children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. Thus far it has identified some related items of literature, presented a provisional theoretical framework, described the methodology pursued in the research, and organised the results of the semi-structured interviews around three paired themes.

The related literature suggested that the education of itinerant and rural students is distinctive and - from the perspective of many urban policy makers - difficult. The qualitative and interpretive theoretical framework aimed to explain the schooling needs and experiences of the Showmen's Guild children in terms of their constructed and perceived itinerant identities. The methodological approach used grounded theory to

explore dimensions of identity and itinerancy as expressed in attitudes and responses to schooling. The interviews revealed extended and intensive social networks as sustaining the itinerant lifestyle; the program being evaluated in relation to how well it met the singular needs of the participants; and the particular demarcation between work and recreation helping to define the children's distinctive identity.

What are the implications of these findings - "the lessons from the carnival" - for Australian teacher education in the 21st century? It is important for teacher graduates to be acquainted with the increasing variety of educational experiences, and with the inexorable weakening of the division between face-to-face and distance learning. In the process, they should become aware of the potential for distance education to enhance the schooling opportunities of children who might otherwise have access to more limited prospects for learning. Teacher graduates should also be equipped to assess the benefits and limitations of programs such as this one, and to consider possible applications with their own students.

As well as gaining greater knowledge and understanding, teacher graduates might usefully be encouraged to become involved in research of the type reported in this paper, by refining possible assumptions about this kind of education for further reflection and action. Even a restricted report of the outcomes of the initial stage of this study has yielded more data than can be accommodated here. The participation of others in this or related projects could be enormously productive in challenging stereotypes about the identities and the educational needs of itinerant and semi-itinerant groups.

Finally, the results reported here suggest elements of a possible model of distance education that might offer replicability to other itinerant groups from different geographical areas. Existing models have focussed on various issues. Twenty-seven educational specialists connected with UNESCO (1989) phrased their study of children belonging to nomad groups in terms of: socio-cultural and socio-economic factors; social and family structures; and teaching methods and learning in conditions of mobility. Holmberg (1989, pp. 162-165) posited several hypotheses about distance learning, distance teaching, and organisation and administration. In his view:

> Central to the learning and teaching in distance education are <u>personal relations</u>, <u>study pleasure</u>, and <u>empathy</u> between students and those representing the supporting organisations. (p. 162)

Holmberg (1992, p. 42) cited four essential characteristics of distance education theory: internal and logical consistency; functional relationships between teaching and learning; specific hypotheses and predictions; and the capacity to collect falsifying research data.

While not at this stage fulfilling all the criteria nominated by Holmberg, the following hypotheses are suggested:

1. Educational aspirations, experiences, and responses need to be understood with reference to constructed and perceived identity.
2. Extended relationships among participants in the schooling experiences of children like those of the Showmen's Guild have the capacity to deviate from role expectations and norms among non-itinerant groups.
3. The perceptions by members of groups like the Showmen's Guild of phenomena such as social networks, schooling, work, and play share important similarities to and differences from the perceptions of these phenomena by non-itinerant people.
4. Diverse cultural experiences exercise greater influence over beliefs and actions than a stereotype of itinerancy.

The particular elements underlying these hypotheses might be conceived as *identity*, *relationships*, *perceptions*, and *context*. If nothing else, the hypotheses and elements suggested here will provide a starting point for interpreting the results of the second stage of this multi-faceted research project.

CONCLUSION

According to one of the home tutors involved in the program, "We're a minority group, that's our problem". While this statement is accurate from the viewpoint of numerical representation, it belies the strength and continuity of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. The co-existence of several generations of members, the recruiting of new members while preserving the influence of long-standing families, and the endurance of the Guild through economic recession all attest to its coherence and resilience.

These characteristics are clearly demonstrated in the program established at the Guild's behest by the Queensland School of Distance Education. Guild members decided what they wanted to be included in their children's education; lobbied for the creation of an appropriate program; exhibit gratitude and loyalty to the teachers who operate the program; and continue to press for its extension into other Australian States. In the

process, the stereotyped view of itinerant education gives way to a recognition of the diversity of experiences and responses that make up the show children's schooling.

The program has several implications for teacher education, particularly the importance for teacher graduates to recognise the variety of educational needs and opportunities to satisfy them evident in Australia. This study of the program has exposed the researchers to a set of schooling experiences with which they were unfamiliar, and has informed them of the potential divergence and expansion of distance learning. It has also increased their knowledge of some of the benefits of collaborative research. These, among others, have been the lessons from the carnival.

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